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AUDITION TECHNIQUE:
A SURVIVAL GUIDE (FOR COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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Abstract

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By Meghan Kathleen Kelleher, MFA.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011
Major Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes, Ph.D, Theatre

Many great actors don't work and many mediocre actors do. Why? The perfect monologue and great song isn't enough to get you hired. Sadly, students are not prepared and equipped with the necessary skill set to take control of their careers. In this economic climate, the ability to audition could not be more imperative. In this thesis, readers will be introduced to the basics of audition technique as developed for Theatre majors at Virginia Commonwealth University as a precursor to their senior year. It will guide them through the first stage of their career. Furthermore, there are unspoken rules, etiquette, and untapped opportunities of which many young actors are simply unaware when auditioning. Through the exploration of auditioning as a technique and not just a means to an end, students will find confidence, understanding, and the tools to prepare them to be successful in gaining employment in the theatre.

An Introduction

In a article I read somewhere, a writer discussed bed bug outbreaks in hotels, particularly in New York, and expressed the need for more “bed bug checkers.” She then went on to say that her best employees were “out of work” actors. She loved working with entertainers because they were flexible, able to deal with high stress situations, and could work quickly. Out-of-work actors who survive by working in unskilled jobs is not uncommon; in fact, it is almost a cliché.

Why are so many actors not doing what they love? Why are they not using the degrees they earned? These are the questions I have asked myself for years. Every time I heard of a friend who had “quit the business,” or another who had “given up,” or another who was “pursuing other interests,” I felt troubled. My disappointment came from the fact that most of the stories were of actors giving up on lifelong dreams, even though they were naturally talented, creative, and they had attended good schools. Slowly, I came to conclude that there was one reason these actors had failed: they had not been taught the business side of theatre.

Since I was a teen, I have been aware of the importance of audition technique. As a teenager, I decided to audition for an Equity production of *Rapunzel*. I came to the audition knowing nothing about what was expected of me. I did a respectable job at the audition, but I did not get the part. After the crush of not getting cast followed by the disappointment and

jealousy of seeing my friends perform on opening night while I remained in the audience, I decided that I would learn as much as I could before the next audition. I read several audition books; I took a musical theatre class; I read over a dozen books on acting, and I sought advice on how to format my first professional resume. I even made my first “head shot” with the family camera and the help of editing software at the local pharmacy. I practiced my songs and monologues for hours on end. I was convinced that preparation would result in success. I was right. Eight months later, my work paid off. I was cast as Charlotte in the musical *Oliver!*, and then went on to perform in eleven productions at Mill Mountain Theatre before my high school graduation. This experience and subsequent audition experiences have continually proven to me that preparation is a key component to acting success.

Next, I went off to a small college in Southwest Virginia to earn a degree in theatre. Three months into college, a friend called me from the theatre conservatory she was attending and told me about the courses she was taking at her school. She boasted about the training she was receiving, the shows in their season, and how she could not wait to start auditioning for summer stock companies. At my liberal arts school, I had only taken one acting class; the rest of my courses were general education. I worried that I would not be taken seriously in the professional world because I was not attending a “serious” program. Always competitive in nature, I began to study on my own. I read every book on auditioning and marketing I could get my hands on. I persuaded a regional theater to let me sit behind the casting table at their next open call. I began auditioning anywhere and everywhere, and by the time summer stock season came along, I was ready! That summer, I booked a great season at a dinner theater that housed

and paid me. I could not have been more proud of myself. This strategy has worked for me; I have never been without an acting job since graduating from college.

I wish I had stories to tell about the time I was discovered as the next big talent, or how my hard work finally paid off when I got cast in my first national television spot or Broadway show. If I told you these anecdotes, I would be lying. I can, however, tell you how an average looking girl of average talent, from a small town and college, decided she would become a professional actor and did. Not only did I work as a professional actor, but I paid all of my bills with acting too!

There is simply no way for me to credit all the information I have gained throughout the years, or to even figure out to whom it should be attributed. I was very lucky in that I learned from others' mistakes, was mentored by successful actors, and was taught by talented directors and casting directors who gave me some invaluable advice. It is through these experiences that I have distilled the information I present here. However, be sure to look in the back of this thesis for suggestions of books to continue your study should you want further explanations. In gathering my experiences and this information, it is my hope that more talented actors will not be forced to give up their dreams because they lack the skills to audition well.

Designing a Class

In the current economic climate, unemployment is particularly common among actors. Therefore, it is even more imperative that we teach our students to survive and succeed in the business. So critical is this component to the actor's success, that presenting oneself well through auditioning techniques should be considered a core skill in the development of an actor.

In 2009, I saw the need for an undergraduate audition technique course at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). I set about creating such a course with a colleague, Anna K. Kurtz, who shared the same vision. We recognized that senior theatre students at VCU were given extensive training in business skills and audition technique their senior year. We felt, in order to fully develop a business mindset, the students needed to be introduced to the ins-and-outs of auditioning earlier in their actor training. Like VCU, many universities wait until the senior year to teach these tools which puts many students at a disadvantage. Earlier introduction would emphasize the importance of professional presentation, enable the students to develop these skills while they learned acting skills, and serve as a precursor to their senior year. Furthermore, presenting audition techniques early in their training would encourage the student to pursue summer work and other acting opportunities, thereby further developing their confidence and their resumes.

In 2010, we began our first semester of this new course. We quickly saw success in our students' abilities and confidence. They performed better at auditions, and many of them passed the Southeastern Theatre Conference screening auditions for the first time. In 2011, encouraged by this success, the course was offered a second time and will be offered for a third time next year. It has been a joy to see these students realize their potential and channel their unique gifts in a way that makes them hireable. With this training I believe they will be ready for more advanced application of this work in their senior level classes. You can refer to the course information and syllabus in *Appendix F* in the back for further explanation.

This thesis is based on the class developed for Virginia Commonwealth University theatre students but is written for all undergraduate theatre students who are ready to begin their

journey into the professional theatre world. It has been my privilege to share what I have learned throughout the years to students of all ages in various auditioning workshops and classes. This is not meant to replace an entire audition course, but rather to serve as an introduction and a simple survival guide to young theatre students as they begin their trek to becoming a professional actor, as well as to empower them to make their careers happen for themselves. These are the ideas that I currently present in the classes I teach, and I hope they will prove to be as successful for you as they have been for me and my students.

Chapter One: Get a Job That Pays You...For Acting!

Congratulations! You are now Chief Executive Officer of “*You, Incorporated.*” Today, you have become the leader, as well as the only shareholder, of your very own company. Now, this may sound extreme, but there is a reason it is called “show business.” It is a business--a business in which you can work. Don’t believe professors who paint a gloomy picture of acting opportunities or try to dissuade you from your dreams. I am here to tell you that, with the right tools, attitude, and work ethic, you can work in this business.

First, abandon that “getting discovered” fairy tale. Yes, there are a few actors who lucked out and got discovered. I applaud them, and will applaud you if you are lucky enough to be one of them. This is not a high percentage proposition. This myth, feeding the hopes of so many actors, is the culprit behind much of the acting unemployment rate. Also, it is just bad thinking. I have never heard a business major say he or she wants to become the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, by taking the 200 bucks they have in savings, moving to Wall Street, and hoping for the best! No, they plan, prepare, and they work their way up the ladder! Why so many actors believe there is a shortcut is beyond me. You just graduated college with a lot of debt! Why, then, would you leave your future to chance? So, instead of waiting to be discovered, get ready to work hard at making yourself marketable.

You can do this! No matter what the statistics say, no matter what your parents say, and no matter what your acting professors say, you can work in theatre. However, notice that I said, “work,” I did not say “make millions,” or promise fame. But you can do what you love and pay your bills. If this is something that sounds good to you, then please read on. Ready?

Strengths and Weaknesses

Before you can begin auditioning it is important for you to really know yourself. Before you can present yourself effectively in front of others you must assess your strengths and weaknesses. I learned a great exercise from an audition technique class I took and have added it to the start of every audition workshop or class I teach. First, I have each student look at an MP3 player and discuss its strengths and weaknesses. Some strengths that they usually come up with: it’s light, stores much data, is portable, and is easy to use. Some of its weaknesses are: it breaks easily, cannot get wet, needs to be backed up regularly, and will be obsolete within a year.

I then ask them to imagine a commercial whose main pitch is, “Get this MP3 player; it breaks easily; it can’t get wet, and don’t buy one now because in a few months, we are going to have a better one.” They laugh, of course, but the truth is that everything has its strengths and weaknesses.

It is important to know your own strengths and play to them. Take time right now to write on a piece of paper the four greatest strengths you have as both a performer and person; then, in another column, write your weaknesses. This may be hard for some, but it is important that you take a good look at yourself. Look at who you are and don’t judge.

Our weaknesses make us human. Acknowledge your weaknesses so that you don’t bring them into the audition room with you. For example, I can be very sensitive, I have a

limited vocal range, I can be very competitive, and I lose focus easily. However, I have to leave these at home and not bring them in to the audition room. It is much easier to do this if you can acknowledge them first. It also lets you know what you need to work on as a person and a performer. They are of no use to you when auditioning, so tell them you will deal with them later, but right now you must work! Developing an honest appraisal of your assets is the first step to preparing for a future in acting. Take the time to approach it with the professionalism your “product” deserves.

Chapter 2: Before the Audition

How to Choose Your Pieces

Whether you are acting a song or acting a monologue, there are some important things to consider when choosing your pieces. First of all, you will need to have both monologues and songs. “But I don’t sing!” many of my students exclaim. “I don’t care,” is my usual response. Every actor needs to have one song that he or she can at least speak-sing with Rex Harrison proficiency. Boldness can sell even the least natural of singers. You want to be a person of “Yes!” Acting is especially important for those of you who do not consider yourselves strong singers; if your technical skills are not the best, then you better act your socks off! Even Shakespearean comedies sometimes add music and singing to keep the easily distracted audience’s attention, and it is a trend that is unlikely to change. It is important that you have at least one song in your repertoire. However, use your common sense when choosing to sing, as singing is based on ability, and if you simply cannot do it, do not open with a song. Save your song for callback purposes. If they want to hear you sing, they will request it.

To you singers, notice I said *acting* a song! You will be *acting* both your monologue and song. In today’s theatre, it is not enough to simply stand and sing beautifully; you must also be committing to the art and craft of acting. It sounds simple but there are many conservatory

automatons auditioning in today's theatre who are not acting but just displaying their vocal prowess.

So, what song and monologue should you choose? Consider the following:

Age:

Gone are the days when eighteen year-olds had to play grandfathers, unless, of course, you are performing at a high school or community theatre. Directors want to see you in a role that they could conceivably cast you in, so ask yourself (or ask a stranger) what age you project. This is key; you might be twenty one, but you look sixteen and vice versa. Pick pieces that are fit within a five year range of the age you naturally project.

Talent Requirements:

It is important that you pick pieces that represent your strongest abilities. If you have never had experience or training with a Shakespearean monologue, then it is best to wait to do those monologues until you have. Also, if you are a young actor and are still building a foundation of skills, it is best not to pick a piece that requires a huge range of emotion or situations that you are not ready to present. It is better to stick to plots that you are familiar with or to characters with whom you share a life experience. When choosing a song, it is not the time to try to belt a high note if you can only do it in your voice lessons. You will want to show off the strongest parts of your voice, and when you add nerves to an audition situation, it is very difficult to hit those reach notes successfully.

Subject Matter:

It is best to stay away from vulgar and offensive pieces unless you are auditioning for a theatre that regularly produces such shows. Even then, however, I would proceed with caution.

You may also want to steer clear of pieces where the character is pitying themselves, shows extreme hate or bigotry, or is uncomfortably sad or hysterical. Stay away from these extremes. First, you never know who is in the room or who you may offend. Second, the pieces you choose reflect your personal taste. When I see an actor perform at an audition, I assume that they chose the piece for a reason, and that they want to show me a part of their personality. Screaming about how you used to beat women and snort cocaine might not be the best way to introduce yourself.

Length:

In regards to length, it is very important to follow rules. If the notice said a one-minute monologue, then it is best to err on the side of fifty seconds. This is your first test: can you follow directions; if you cannot do this, then why would I expect you to follow direction in my play? Directors and their plays are like new parents with a baby, and you are the babysitter. You want us to believe that you can be trusted with our baby.

Overdone Pieces:

I personally believe that you cannot concern yourself too much with this rule because, if you really get nit-picky, almost all good pieces have been overdone. If you want to do “I hate Hamlet,” and you do it best, by all means, do it. Sometimes, actors are so obsessed with overdone monologues that they present little known pieces that are obscure for a reason...poor writing. However, now is the time to start reading plays and listening to musicals. There are hundreds of pieces out there. Don’t be lazy; go discover those gems. In *Appendix A*, I have included my personal list of overdone monologues and songs that you might want to avoid. Remember this is just my opinion. It is most important to find material that is a fit for you.

Type of Show:

What are you auditioning for? Usually, the casting notice will tell you what style of piece they would prefer. However, if they do not, do some investigating and see if you can find a piece that represents the era or mood of the show. It is important to make sure this piece is well-rehearsed, though. If you found out about an audition the night before and do not have time to work on it, then it is better to stick to something you have done before and feels solid. (If you make the repertoire book that we are going to discuss later on, this panic will be less likely to happen.)

Rehearsing Your Pieces

Now that you have chosen pieces that are a fit, it is time to get them performance ready. I will not dwell too long on this topic because this is a discussion about auditioning not acting. You should be learning the basics of monologue and character work in your acting classes.

The best way you can prepare yourself for your upcoming auditions is to recreate the atmospheres in which you will have to perform. In our audition class we create a series of mock or trial auditions for our students so that they can be ready for any situation. These examples listed below are supposed to test and prepare the actor. You must be ready for anything. By anything, I mean taking notes and adjustments, and being prepared for an interview afterward, or hundreds of other curve balls that could be thrown your way. You cannot predict every situation you may run into, but you can practice several of them. Create mock auditions with your peers to practice various audition types, and take turns playing the part of the director. You will surprise

yourself with how much learn from being behind the table. Here are some audition scenarios for you to try creating:

The Crazy Audition:

In this mock audition, everything that can go wrong does. Student “directors” set up the worst audition situation they can imagine. The directors either do not pay attention, give unreasonable or copious amounts of adjustments, or are easily distracted. In our class, we also try to change the venue at these auditions at the last minute to keep the student actors on their feet. The trick with these auditions is to remain calm, cool, and collected. Stay focused and roll with the punches. When auditioning, you are a “yes” person. “Yes, I would love to do my monologue as a kangaroo, in an audition room the size of a closet, while I watch you eat your sandwich.”

The Cold Audition:

This audition can be the most difficult because of the lack of opinion and interaction from the director. The student “directors” should remain neutral and distant to the actors performing in front of them. They may answer questions with one word statements and barely look up as actors enter. Try very hard not to take these directors’ actions personally. In a real life situation, the directors could be simply tired, or maybe so many actors are attending this audition that they simply do not have the time to engage in conversation. Remain upbeat, stay focused, and leave pleasantly no matter what kind of response you receive.

The Champion Audition:

This audition can actually be the one that tests your skills the most. Student “directors” should remain upbeat, conversational, and pleasant. While this may seem like the ideal situation

for you to perform in, many young actors get thrown off when they must do something other than what they prepared. They may give you notes to test your flexibility, or to see a range that your pieces do not offer. Also, if they want to engage you in conversation after your audition, take a deep breath and get ready to charm their pants off! Make sure you are ready to talk about something other than theatre; this is the time where they are looking at your personality and who you are as a human being. Be yourself, and have fun; they like you, so, loosen up! Stay open and ready for anything.

Hopefully, you will never come across stressful auditions, especially with the extreme antics that your peers just created. Reality and audition television shows have created a myth perpetuated among young actors about cruel directors. You will hardly ever meet the cruel director types, who seek to humiliate and degrade auditioning actors. On the contrary, you will generally find directors who are gracious and understanding because they were once in your position. If anything, you will find them to be hopeful. It is very stressful to put together a cast of actors, and they are hoping you are going to be the one to wow them. Nevertheless, it is still important that you practice these situations so that you are able to continue to present yourself professionally no matter what obstacle is thrown at you.

Find Auditions

Now that you know what to expect, it is important to get out there and practice. Auditioning is a muscle that must be flexed. Go to every audition you have the opportunity to attend, especially while you are in school and while your success doesn't determine your ability to pay rent or eat. It is also important to begin making as many connections as you can, because

the contacts you make now may help you get a job later. Get as much professional experience as possible now, so that when you enter the profession upon graduation, you get a running start.

The most obvious way to work while in school is through acting at summer theaters throughout the country. This very industry, including outdoor theaters and amusement venues, regularly hires college students to perform in its summer season. While these jobs generally don't pay much, the benefits of working professionally throughout the summer will pay dividends upon graduation. Summer work introduces you to other actors, directors, choreographers, and musical directors outside of your current circle. These colleagues, many of whom have extensive experience, will serve as great networking resources later. Summer work also allows you to add professional credits to your resume, which will set you apart when you begin competing with other recent graduates.

There is plenty of summer work within most states. You will find in the *Appendix B* a list of these theaters. It is important to start checking their websites as early as November; many of these local calls happen in January and February and require appointments for auditions.

If you are graduating, it is time to get on your game face and start making a plan, preferably the summer before your senior year. This is not too early to begin narrowing down your options upon graduation. Even if you are involved in a showcase, I recommend not only attending the local auditions I previously described but also trying to go to several combined auditions around the country. Combined auditions are held annually and attended by several companies at once, think of them as sort of a theatre job fair. It is said that after graduation it will take several auditions to nail down one job. Just as it is with fishing, if you want to catch a fish, cast wide and keep your bait in the water.

Combined auditions are both awful and awesome at the same time. On one hand, you can be seen by some of the best regional theatre companies in the country, all at one audition. However, all of those companies see the same audition and that audition is only, at most, ninety-seconds long. A mistake multiplies its impact at combined auditions. With that aside, I think they are both essential and invaluable because of the amount of exposure you receive in a single day. For these auditions, though, it is even more important that you do your research and prepare!

So important are these auditions, that actors can work for the entire year based on one audition at the Unified Professional Theatre Auditions in Memphis, Tennessee. The combined audition, though nerve racking, is critical for the beginning actor. Don't miss them. In *Appendix B*, I have a detailed list of the best combined auditions in the country.

Do Your Homework

Lastly, please do your homework. It is extremely important that you do your background research before you attend an audition. You will want to know all the major aspects of the pieces you are performing. This should include but is not limited to name of character, name of the show, playwrights name, relationship to other, objective, the situation of the piece you are performing, the stakes, and the setting. When the director is giving you adjustments and he or she asks where this play takes place, an answer of "I am not sure, I got this from a monologue book," will not only be embarrassing but will also keep you from getting the job.

Your research should also include all the facts about the theater, their season, and the important people who work at the theater. You will not want to be caught off guard when someone asks you "what is your favorite show in our season?" They aren't testing you; they are interested.

Before the audition you will also want to make sure you know exactly where the audition takes place and the best way for you to travel there. You will not want to be walking around the city aimlessly in your audition heels looking for the studio. You will also want to make sure you know exactly what they want you to present. Again, if you can't follow these rules than why would the company expect you to be able to do anything else?

After doing my research, I like to make myself a small index card cheat sheet with vital information. This is especially useful when you audition for several companies in one day. Not only will you stand out if you know about the company and can speak about the theater's mission, but you will also save yourself the humiliation of mixing up the theatre companies.

Chapter 3: The Actor's Toolbox

If you are serious about a career in theatre you need to start collecting the items that will go in your Actor's Toolbox. Having these items will allow you to be prepared for anything that will be asked of you in an audition situation. The following are the essential instruments in this toolbox and an explanation on how to prepare them.

Headshot

Virtually every theatre will require a headshot. If you are serious about working in this industry, then it is imperative that you obtain a high quality photo. It is unacceptable to not have this in your toolbox, ready at a moment's notice. You will be sending out pictures to potential employers. So, if you are serious about acting, invest in some really good pictures. By "really good pictures" I mean ones that are shot with a high quality camera, look like you, and capture some personality. Capture some personality? Yep, the best pictures capture the essence of the person and sends out some energy. One trick a photographer showed me when picking out headshots was to cover up everything in the picture but the eyes. Pick the picture where the eyes really speak to you. The best source to find a great headshot photographer is by referral. If someone has great shots, ask them who took them! You will not only get a chance to see the photographer's work up close, but you can also assess how professional the session is based on your friend's experience.

Resume

Most theaters will also require a resume. Putting together a professional resume requires time and effort, but it is definitely worthwhile. No matter how much experience you have, proper formatting and organization will set you apart from your peers as a professional who takes his or her career seriously. A resume is not just a list of the plays you have done; it really gives a director an idea of who you are. It tells us where and with whom you have worked, who we have in common, and what roles you think are the most valuable, which can tell us a lot about the work you find rewarding and valuable.

Now is the time to show everything you learned in your freshman introduction to computers class. Attention must be paid to proper formatting. You will want to format a document with clean lines, an attractive and easy-to-read font, proper spacing, and organized columns. Time is of the essence in an audition, and sloppy and confusing resumes are more likely to get thrown away than considered. Here are a couple of rules about formatting your first resume:

- Size does matter. Use a font that is large enough to read easily. You do not have to squish everything you have done since the first grade on your resume. It is much better to select a few good credits than to include a laundry list of everything in a small, hard to read small font.
- Learn to use the tab key and margin settings. Columns and indentation should be neat and uniform. The overall appearance reflects your attention to details, and using well organized formatting will allow easy editing as you add to your resume.
- Acting resumes should never exceed one page. Never. Nothing will make you look more unprofessional and amateur than turning in a three-page resume.

- Resumes are usually organized into four basic sections: personal information, acting experience, training, and special skills.

You can find an example of a student resume in *Appendix C*.

Personal Information:

In the first section of your resume, the very first thing that should capture the reader's eye is your name. This should be large, centered, and in a bold font, preferably the same font that you used for your name on your headshot and the font that you use for your post card, business card, or any correspondence, for that matter. Remember that you are creating a business, and using the same font can help with consistency. Next, you will want to include in the line below your union affiliations using their abbreviations (AEA for Actor's Equity, EMC for Equity Membership Candidacy, SAG for Screen Actor's Guild...etc.). Next, you will want to include your contact information; phone number and email address. Again, make sure to obtain a professional email address before you start auditioning. I also advise students not to include their home address. You will be sending this out to many strangers, and it is best not to include your place of residence. You could also include a personal website if you have one. However, only include this address if you have designed a professional website and plan to update it frequently. A director might visit your site to learn more about you, and it can be very embarrassing if you have not updated it in a year. The next section will contain your voice part (Alto, Soprano, Mezzo, Tenor, Baritone, Bass) and your vocal range, if you know it. Across from this you will want to put your hair and eye color, height, and weight. When deciding on weight, ask someone to tell you how much you look like you weigh. Several dancer friends I have weigh a lot more than they look; if they were to put their true weight, directors might misunderstand

their proportions. Now, I am talking about a difference of five to eight pounds. If you weigh 160 pounds do not put 125. You may also eliminate this section if you feel your weight might hinder you.

Acting Experience:

In this next section you will list your prior credits. If you are new to the business with only a few roles, you will list this section as “theatre.” If you have a couple of significant professional credits then you may want to separate these into two categories “professional” and “educational.” Eventually the goal is to replace all of your high school and college credits with professional ones. Also, do not list every role you have ever played, especially if many of those roles are not your type or age range. A small, well-chosen list is much more effective than a huge roster of every one-act festival you have participated. Last but certainly not least, NEVER lie. Inevitably you will get caught, and it will be very embarrassing. I recently worked in the office of a professional theatre company. We regularly received at least fifty headshots and resumes in the mail each day, and it was my job to separate them into folders. One day, I came upon a resume that claimed an actor had played the role of Leisl in a production of *The Sound of Music*, a production in which I had performed. This credit stood out to me. I knew that this actor had *not* played this role; my best friend had. I also knew she had not understudied it because I had! After a few phone calls, we learned that she had never even worked at that theater. Needless to say, her package ended up in the trash, and I still remember her name. Directors understand you are young with only a few roles; there is no reason to lie and risk damaging your reputation, perhaps permanently.

There are several ways to format a resume, this is just one to get you started. Again, you can see the full version in *Appendix C*. When listing your credits, break them down into these three columns. The title of the show should be italicized. If you did not have a name in the show simply write ensemble, and be sure to list the state in which the theatre is located to help us see where you have worked. Also, if you would like to list a prominent director, I prefer for this to be directly under the play's title, slightly tabbed in. I find that a fourth column looks jumbled and messy.

<u>Play</u>	<u>Character</u>	<u>Name of Theatre, State</u>
<i>The Music Man</i>	Harold Hill	Mountain Theatre, VA

(Dir: Jerry Hopkins)

Make sure you frequently update your resume and have several versions, depending on the type of show for which you are submitting. For example, if you are auditioning for *West Side Story*, you may want your musical credits to be listed first.

Training:

In the training section you will want to first list any degrees you are obtaining or have obtained. Even if you did not receive a theatre degree, you should still list your college degree. A friend of mine used to invite great conversation when directors realized she was a math major, people were interested in how she transitioned into theatre. You will next want to list your teachers in acting, voice, dance (also, include styles), movement, and any other significant training you have received. If you have taken some great workshops you could list these here, but limit the workshops to no more than three and only include the ones that are the most professional.

Special Skills:

Some relevant special skills I have seen recently include: fluent foreign languages, musical instruments you play proficiently, gymnastic or tumbling skills, advanced roller skating, clown work, juggling, if you work well with children, sight singing or reading, or special dialects you can perform. The special skill area is also a place where you can add a couple of technical theatre skills that you can do proficiently. In this economy, many theaters are hiring actors in repertory, and the more skills you have, the more marketable and valuable you can be to a theater. Just be careful listing too many technical skills because you want to be seen as an actor first. Do not put something like dancing or singing unless it something truly unique, such as salsa dancing or yodeling. If you are auditioning, I will assume that you do these things already, and this will be represented in your training section. Currently on my acting resume, I have “can contort into a human pretzel.” Though I have never been able to include this skill in a performance, and I don’t know of any plays (except perhaps *Barnum*) that would need this, this has sparked many conversations at casting calls. A sense of humor, if not overdone, can be good here. It might not get you the job, but it allows for conversation and for them to see you as a fun, playful person.

What Not to Include:

Many young actors make the mistake of getting advice from their parents or well-meaning English teachers when creating a resume. As a result, many students have resumes that look like you are applying for a business job. Unfortunately, no matter how proud you are of them, there are several items that are not appropriate for a professional acting resume. These

include: clubs or fraternal groups, awards, or grade point average. These items will look great for scholarship applications or other resumes, but they will clutter your acting resume and make you look like an amateur.

Repertoire Book

Invest in a large three-ring binder and buy dividers for it. This binder will be a great help at auditions. Make yourself a title page and table of contents, and make sure the binder has side folders with extra pockets. Again you want to be the person who says “yes!” The more prepared you are, the better, so here’s a suggested list of items and examples for your book to get you started:

Songs:

- Jazz Standard- *At Last, Fly Me to the Moon*
- Pre-Golden Age- *Pal Joey, Babes in Arms, The Boys from Syracuse, Good News*
- Golden Age- *On the Town, Brigadoon, Guys and Dolls*
- 50’s and 60’s Song- *It’s My Party and I’ll Cry If I Want To*
- 1960-1970 Musical Theatre- *Hello Dolly, The Fantasticks*
- Musical Theatre Pop- *Once On This Island, Lucky Stiff, Baby, Children of Eden*
- Pop Rock- *Billy Joel songs, songs by Beatles*
- Country Song- *Crazy, Blue Moon*
- Blue Grass Song- *I’ll Fly Away*
- Sondheim- For Sondheim auditions only.
- A current hit.
- A quirky character piece.

- A very obscure song that no one has heard of in case you arrive at an audition and everyone keeps singing your pieces.
- A dramatic ballad.

After you have chosen the songs you will want to include in your book, there are several things you need to do to prepare your music.

Monologues:

- Shakespeare
- Restoration or Manner Piece
- Early Realism
- Anti-Realism
- Contemporary Monologue (Comedic and Dramatic).
- Children's Piece that shows body and voice work (or poem).

Do not get overwhelmed with these recommendations, they are merely suggestions. I would also offer that you should try to have a variety of comedic and dramatic roles to choose from. Placing all of these songs and monologues in your book will be a lifesaver when you hear that the director is asking for an additional verse piece. You will be able to look it up in your book to refresh yourself.

The Music

After you have chosen the songs you will want to include in your book, there are several things you need to do to prepare your music. Before you arrived at the audition, you should make sure you prepare your music in a way that is simple to use and easy to see. If you found your sheet music in a book, make sure you have a legible copy of it. You may have to shrink it ninety-

three percent on the copier to make the whole music appear; you don't want any notes cut off.

Place your music in a binder with non-glare protective sheets. This is very important. You don't want the light to glare the music and make it difficult for the accompanist to read. You will next want to mark your music with the following:

- Mark where you will begin and end, with the words "start" and "stop." Written legible with a bold pen. You will then want to highlight this to make it stand out.
- Mark key changes and any music notation you will be following.
- Highlight the words you will be singing if there are two lines of lyrics.
- Write the cue line of the monologue if you will be doing a monologue before a song. This will tell the accompanist when you would like them to start. It will also keep your momentum up because you will not have to stop to tell them you will be starting your song now.
- Highlight and clearly mark any cuts you are making in the music.

When placing music in your book, attempt to place the pages in such a way that it allows for the least amount of page turns. For example, if your cut is two pages, place one on the left and one on the right, so that they open up to each other. Also, make sure the music is written in the key you want to sing in it. The website www.musicnotes.com is very helpful in that you can transpose your own music into a key you want to sing it. However, do not get used to this luxury for two reasons. One, the director may want to hear it in the original key. Two, transposing a song too much can alter the way a song sounds. It is better just to find songs written for your voice part.

Packing List

It is very important to bring everything you might need. However, it should be contained in one bag so that it is carried easily to and from your audition. A nice audition bag will look attractive and professional and contain the following, at the very least:

- A calendar: include all classes, rehearsals, upcoming auditions, and appointments so you are able to speak about your availability with confidence and certainty.
- A notebook: so you can write down all information you gain during the experience, important names of people you met, and any details you find out about the casting.
- A repertoire binder of your current material
- Extra Pens, Pencils, and a Miniature Stapler
- Deodorant, Bobby Pins, Hair Elastics, Makeup for touch ups, Breath Mints, Tylenol and Tums.
- Dance or Movement Attire, Shoes for Movement
- Extra Head-shots and Resumes stapled and ready.
- A snack and bottle of water in case of a long wait.
- An MP3 player with music from the shows of the theatre's season. Nothing can be more invaluable than being able to hear the music for a quick second before they call you in to learn something from the show.
- Recordings of your music that you can sing along with, in case the accompanist has to leave or is not present.

This list is just for starters and for you to use as a guide, but remember to think like a boy scout and “be prepared.” Again, it will be such a relief to answer “yes” to anything someone

throws at you. “Yes, I can sing without an accompanist. Yes, I do have another monologue. Yes, here is another headshot. Yes, I can put my tap shoes on.”

Chapter 4: The Look

Smile! It does not matter if you have the best outfit in the world, you must still have the personality to accompany it. However, if you are going up against a girl your same height, vocal range, acting chops, dance ability, and hair color, and you are wearing an ill-fitting, clingy dress that adds inches to your waist, then yes! What you wear does matter!

When actors tell me that the acting business should not be about looks, then my answer is “get in another business.” It *is* about looks! Now, I did not say it is about beauty, but it is about looks. After all, you send out a 8”x10” picture of your head in hopes someone will let you audition for them. Casting directors are trying to reconcile their vision of a character with the actors that audition. Acting is in part a visual art, and demonstrating that you “look the part” is an important part of the audition.

The first step is to figure out what exactly your look is. In the business, they call this your type. I think the best way to figure out this type is to ask several people who you have known for awhile, as well as some people you have just met, some questions that help you formulate an objective idea of who you are.

Ask them to fill out the “Essence Questionnaire,” I have included in *Appendix D*. This list was developed in our Audition Technique class to help my students really see what others see. It is important to not only see yourself as just a character actor or a leading lady. These

titles are limiting and not specific enough to help you choose material. The abstract questions also allow the person to really get at the core of how they receive you and not just make a quick judgment. After receiving the results of the quiz, find an hour to analyze what you read. Make sure to pay attention to the similarities. If, when asked what kind of drink you would be, you receive answers like “a Shirley Temple,” or “milk,” perhaps you exude a certain youth or innocence. If, when asked what kind of cloth, the respondents echo “burlap,” or other hard textiles, then you may come across as a little rough around the edges. If both answers were for the same actor, I might suggest that they look at a young blue collar boy that has a little bit of temper like, say, Tom from *The Glass Menagerie*.

Now that you know your type, it is time to brand yourself a bit. Pick out pieces that go with that type, or purposefully play against it. Either way, you need to know how others see you. It is so refreshing to see young actors come into an audition and really show who they are. To know oneself is a sign of maturity and people will want to work with you because of this self-realization. Everything you present in an audition should reflect your brand and your type. Your resume, your headshot, and your outfit should all represent your brand, so choose these items wisely. *Why?* Consistency. If Nike™ suddenly got rid of the swoosh and began using a large star, it would be confusing to their customers; sales would probably drop. You must help the directors remember you, and being consistent is the first step.

The Outfit

What to wear to an audition is a frequent and difficult question. What you wear to an audition is a very personal decision and varies depending on type of audition, the audition location, the weather, and other factors. It should not, however, be taken lightly. It is much easier for me to list these as a simple “do’s and don’ts” list, based on my time behind the table. Again, these are just my observations. If you have a killer black dress that you really want to wear, then wear it. Try it out, and see if it works for you.

Don’t:

- Wear clunky shoes. It can be very distracting.
- Wear black (okay sometimes, but you don’t want to blend in and end up looking like a floating head if the lighting is austere).
- Short skirts (you might be on a stage, with the directors looking up)
- Show cleavage (you want them to pay attention to you, not your breasts.)
- Wrinkly shirts (look like you care).
- Wear logos.
- Also, do not wear a skirt or blazer (unless you are auditioning for the role of a business man or woman). You do not want to look like you are working on Wall Street, either. Professional attire in theatre is different than professional attire in the business world. You want to look poised, at ease, and the best version of yourself.

Do:

- Look pulled together.

- Wear something flattering.
- Wear color.
- Wear something you can easily move in.

Women should invest in a great a-line dress because it looks good on everyone. One great dress, that is well structured and not too thin, and you can wear it to almost all of your auditions. Men should know that a great trend right now is a button shirt and vest because it looks both modern and gives a sense of era and helps directors see you in any time or place. Outfit choice plays a very important role in your audition, so choose wisely. I was once sitting in an audition where a young woman came in wearing a very short dress, so short in fact, that I was sure I could see her undergarments. She presented a well acted monologue and a song that featured her extraordinary voice. After she left, I turned to the director and asked him what he thought about the audition. I was sure he would sing her praises, but he barely noticed her, all he could talk about was that, “short, pink, number.” My point is: you want the people in the room to pay attention to your talent, not your other “assets.” If you choose the right attire you will set yourself up for success. You will feel great, and if you feel great, you will perform better. Be yourself, but be your best, perfectly put together self.

Chapter Five: The Audition

Good Morning! It is the day of the show! I prefer to say show, instead of audition, simply because when I started looking at auditions as chances to perform my one-woman show, it made the experience much more enjoyable. Get a good night's sleep the night before and make sure you have everything lined up in the morning. One of my favorite acting instructors would caution that the audition begins the night before, and I agree.

If you have time, do a vocal and physical warm-up before you get to the audition. This could be as simple as taking a morning yoga class or doing scales with a recording from one of your voice lessons. At the very least shake out your body, try to speak in different registers or sing along with the radio on your way to the audition. You will want to be performance ready when you get there. If by chance they are running early and would like to move your appointment up when you arrive, you will be ready. If they give you a room to warm-up in, use it to your advantage, but be considerate. It is very rude to distract others with unnecessary and unnerving vocal trills and jumping jacks. The competition takes place onstage, not in the warm-up room.

When you arrive, check in and make sure you find out any information you might need or see if any changes have been made to the audition. Be kind and gracious to everyone you meet, especially the person who is signing you in. Keeping an audition running and organized is very

stressful; they will really appreciate it if you are patient and pleasant. Also, you never know what connections they have at the theater. Sometimes the person signing in actors may have more connections with the director than you might be aware of. Also, be aware of anything you say in the hallways. I once knew a director who sent spies into the hallways to see who was being nice and who was being rude. He was casting a long tour, and it was very important that no “divas” got cast. After you have signed in, go find a place to sit and wait. Make sure you are within earshot of the auditor for any announcements.

While you are waiting, remember why you are there. It is very easy for auditions to turn into happy hour. Of course you can converse with your fellow actors, but now is not the time to be a social butterfly. Bring a book or listen to some music while you wait. If you get easily nervous it is even more important to take this time for yourself. A bragging actor nearby or a show off singer warming-up will only fuel your nerves. I tell my students to come up with their own audition mantra that they repeat in their head if nerves start to get to them while they wait. This sounds a little new age, but it can really help you focus. Something like, “I am here for me and me alone. I am prepared. I am open to possibility and ready for anything.”

Typing Out

Sometimes you will arrive at an audition with hundreds of other actors only to get “typed out.” Typically directors will do this when there are too many actors, not enough time, and they are looking for a very specific look, height, or experience level. Someone will line you up in groups of ten or so, sometimes in the hallway, and ask some actors to stay and some to leave. Try to not take this process personally. Instead, realize that they are saving you time as well. You are not what they are looking for, so now you can go do something else with your day instead of

wasting it waiting to audition for something they will not cast you in anyways. Sometimes, if you are lucky, they will still ask you to leave your headshot and resume for other projects they may work on in the future.

Finally, you hear your name called. Now is the time to get your game face on. Say your mantra to yourself and leave your weaknesses at the door. You are prepared and ready. Resist the urge to think about the future or how great it will be if you book the job, just focus on the task at hand. Take a breath and enter the room.

Speaking To the Accompanist

After you enter with energy and greet the people in the room, make your way to the accompanist if you are auditioning for a musical. When you walk up to the piano player make sure that you greet him or her with a friendly hello. It is important to quickly establish a favorable relationship with the accompanist as you two will be a team during this audition. If the accompanist likes you, he or she can be helpful in case you make a mistake while you are singing. I once skipped right to the chorus and the accompanist followed me without blinking, and the directors were never wise to my mistake.

You will next want to walk the accompanist through your music. Introduce the song and what show it is from first. Then, walk him or her through your piece: where you will begin, where you will end, and any important music notations that you want to point out. Also, discuss with him or her what kind of introduction you would like. There are many kinds of “intros;” discuss with your vocal coach which one would work best for your particular song. You will next want to explain the tempo of the piece. I asked several of my piano playing colleagues what they would prefer, and they all unanimously agreed that they would prefer you sing along at the

pace you would like and lightly tap the tempo on your side. Never snap or clap at an accompanist. Try to take a deep breath and calm yourself before you do this so you do not sing too fast. Practice this speech before the audition so it can be concise and complete. Say thank you and continue to the center of the room for your audition.

The Slate Is Your Friend

Slating, the introduction of yourself and your pieces, is probably the most overlooked aspect of auditioning. Many great acting students will spend hours perfecting their look, polishing their monologue, and practicing their song. Very few students rehearse their slate. There is a common saying in theatre that goes something like this, “A director decides whether he wants to hire you within the first thirty seconds.” Although I have seen a few performers redeem themselves with amazing acting chops or extraordinary belting abilities, few come back from a lackluster entrance. You are being watched from the moment you enter the room. How you carry yourself says a lot about who you are, and casting directors are looking at personality, not just talent.

So, you enter the room with gusto, you speak to the piano player with confidence, and you walk to your audition X with poise. You must now introduce yourself to the people in the room. First, make sure they are ready for you. Sometimes, they might still be jotting down notes from a previous performer; other times they might be grabbing a quick bite to eat. Whatever the hold up, do not start speaking until you have gotten their attention. They will show this to you by making eye contact. Next, be ready to engage in some small talk. I advise you to be ready because you do not want to start slating if they want to begin a conversation; no one wants to work with an automaton. Most of the time, just a few polite niceties will be exchanged and they

will instruct you to start or will ask what you brought today. In regional combined auditions, you will just begin because you will not be able to have individual conversations with everyone in the room. If you were instructed to bring more than one piece, introduce all pieces at the top of your slate; you will not want to lose momentum by stopping to introduce the next piece. The following are some examples of Slates:

For a large cattle call or regional combined audition:

- Good (Morning/Afternoon/Evening), my name is (insert your name), number (insert number if given one).

For local calls or smaller auditions:

- Hello, my name is (insert your name). This is a piece from (insert the title of play or musical).

For introductions of more than one piece, this is (title of play or musical from which your monologue comes from), and (name of song or name of play or musical if doing another monologue).

Some of you might be wondering about the name of the character. Most directors have heard of the pieces you are doing. If they have not, they might ask, so be prepared with the answer. During a slate, however, there is no need to waste time with the character's name or to explain what is happening before the piece starts. Now, the examples of slates above sound easy enough, right? However, you would not believe how many actors hurt themselves with a simple introduction. The most common mistake I see is the stating of one's own name. It is your name; say it with confidence (or change it to one you like)! Your name is a line you have been practicing for at least eighteen years. If you cannot handle this line, why would you expect a director to trust you with an entire script? Actors sometimes trail off at the end of their sentences

as if they are apologizing for their names, or they allow their voices to pitch up at the end, as if it is a question. Katie Smith? It makes us think you are unsure. I tell my students to imagine that their name is written on a marquee: Katie Smith. You will be surprised what a difference that makes! There are many other common mistakes when presenting a slate:

- Starting before you stop moving. Plant your feet firmly, ground yourself, breathe in the room, then start speaking.
- Letting out a huge exhale before you begin. Doing this takes all of your energy away.
- Forgetting to smile. Everyone knows that smiling is contagious, so make sure to smile.

However, be aware of the forced toothy pageant smile; you want to seem pleasant and at ease, not fake.

Remember, slating can be your friend. I really mean this. Sometimes, you will go to huge auditions where hundreds of theaters are represented. You only get ninety-seconds to show that you have the range to get cast by children's theaters, Shakespeare companies, regional repertory theaters, musical summer stocks, and experimental theaters. You surely cannot show seventeen-seconds of five different monologues or songs! Well, I guess you could, but you would leave everyone in the room with their heads spinning.

You could, however, show three sides of yourself. You could show two pieces, and you could plan the perfect slate as your last character. As an actor, I perform a great funny, crazy, flighty girl character mainly because that is who I am. If my slate was exactly this aspect of myself when I did this monologue, I would be missing a great opportunity. When auditioning, my slate is a grounded, mature, and lower ranged; the epitome of a confident woman. With my slate, I am able to show some additional range. Now, I am not suggesting that you shouldn't be

yourself, but that you should find a contrasting part of yourself to show an additional character. Remember that you are an actor; take every opportunity to show us you can act! The slate is indeed part of the entire performance, do this and you will set yourself apart.

Exits

Just as your entrance is very important, so is your exit. Wait for a moment to see if they would like you to do anything else, if not, say thank you, and leave. Do not forget to pick up your music if you sang and thank the accompanist again. Play a positive action as you leave, even if you do not believe you have done your best. They might have thought you did wonderfully, so let them think that! Resist the urge to run out of the room to get the experience over. Walk out with confidence and grace. Save the emotions for home.

The Dreaded Dance Call

Congratulations! They called you back to dance! They really like you! Dance calls can be a very scary prospect for many actors, so my first piece of advice is to get into a dance class as soon as possible! Even if you do not plan on being a musical theatre performer, dancing skills are a necessity for today's well-rounded performer. It is not enough for actors to just be actors and work professionally. Make yourself the most marketable and flexible actor by being able to do it all. With today's audiences being influenced by pop television and other dance shows, dance is becoming an even bigger part of today's theatre. With audiences also having shorter attention spans and the desire to "get their money's worth," musical movement and singing are appearing in plays and Shakespeare festivals to keep audiences interested. So, learn to dance!

While you are learning to dance, also make sure to learn dance vocabulary. This is extremely important in surviving the dance call. Many times, there will be so many dancers

piled into a room that the only way you are learning the dance is by hearing the terms shouted across the room because you cannot see the choreographer. Knowing these terms will also make you feel at ease, like you know the language in a foreign country, so do not just learn the moves.

The main way to succeed at a dance call is just to loosen up and have fun. The dance call is a way to show your personality and to predict what you will be like in rehearsal. Stressing out or getting frustrated will only hurt you. Also, sometimes a theater might only have time to teach one dance call. If this is the case, the dance you will learn might be a mix of both basic and advanced dance moves. Do not fret. They might only be looking at you to see if you move well, not if you can do a double pirouette. Just master the moves you can and smile through the rest.

I would also like to let you in on a secret. When you are acting and presenting your song, the director's attention is only on you, and for the most part, even if they are looking down writing notes they can still hear you and make good judgments on your abilities. Dance calls are different. Not only are you performing in groups, but every time they look down, they are missing part of the dance call. Knowing this is to your advantage. If you mess up, fifty percent of the time, they probably will not catch it. Therefore, make sure not to project the mistake on your face for the rest of the dance; keep it a secret. Also, make sure you really master the first eight count and the final pose. Chances are they will see the beginning and the end; if you are having an off day, you still might trick them into thinking that you performed the middle accurately.

Getting called back to dance is a feather in your cap, and it can be fun. I used to think of it as a free dance class, and that really put it into perspective for me and calmed my nerves. Remember that they asked *you* to dance, not the other way around. As long as you did not lie on

your resume, you have nothing to prove. They do not expect perfection; they just expect that you try. Invest in a great dance outfit and shoes while you are at it because, if you feel like a dancer, you are probably less likely to feel out of place. Last, but certainly not least, do not forget to act! Make sure you find a story to tell and an objective to achieve while dancing, and you will set yourself apart.

Chapter 6: After the Audition

The audition is over, now what? First, keep smiling and leave the premises. Never complain, talk about yourself unfavorably, or speak negatively until you are a safe distance from the audition. Then go do something to relax. Also, remember to reward yourself. Reward yourself for doing your best and for being prepared; be glad you had a chance to perform today. During dry spells between contracts this might be your only chance to perform, so look at it that way. Next, record the experience in your audition journal. (I will discuss this in detail below). It is important to do this while the information is still fresh in your mind. You will want to have all of those details for reference later. All parts are equally important. What if a director calls you six months after the audition to speak to you? Wouldn't it be helpful if you could turn to that audition and remind yourself who this is director is, when you met him, and what theatre he represents? The director will be pleased that you remembered the experience. Staple any research you did about that theatre before the audition to the entry as well.

Next, remember to stay in contact with the people you met at the audition. Perhaps send them a thank you note for the opportunity and inform them about your next project. Remember that auditions are not for one single role but rather for a lifetime of opportunities. Stay connected.

After you have done all of that, let it go. You are a person, and you are not defined by your auditions. Carrying negative feelings will only lower your self esteem, so move on, and

look to your next audition and “opportunity to perform.” You can do this; you have just got to stick to it. Remember, the more auditions you try, the better you will get. Success is a process that occurs through hard work and persistence.

The Audition Journal

Auditioning is, in the end, very personal and subjective. Though every theatre professor or teacher has an opinion, you must decide which pieces of advice to use. How? The answer is simple: Trial and Error. What will work for you might not be what has worked for others. You are an individual and nothing is more important than being in charge of your own success. Now is the time to take control of your career and to be proactive towards your future.

The best habit I can tell you to begin, and one we require in our audition class, is an audition journal. In *Appendix E*, you will find a format that we have found to be useful. You will be able to start answering for yourself why you did or did not get the job. It is easy for us to say, “It was out of my control; they wanted blondes.” That might actually be the case and, in that instance, it was out of your control. Many aspects of auditioning are not in your control, but many are, so be diligent. Using an audition journal will also allow you an easy reference to return to when trying to recall a specific audition.

If you document all of your auditions carefully, you will begin to notice patterns in your preparation, material, etc. You will also be able to correlate those patterns with outcomes and then be able to use these as a barometer for when you get the callback and when you do not. Very soon, you will be able to use that exact formula and receive the results you desire! It is science, my friends! Here is an example of the information gathered in several journal entries:

- Audition # 1: I sang “Trip to the Library” from *She Loves Me*, and performed a monologue from the play *Picnic*. Wore purple wrap dress. Very well prepared. Callback, but no job.
- Audition # 2: I sang “ I think I May Want to Remember Today” from *Starting Here, Starting Now*, and performed a monologue from the play *Picnic*. Wore grey structured dress. Very well prepared. Callback, but no job.
- Audition #3: I sang “I Think I May Want to Remember Today” from *Starting Here, Starting Now*, and performed a monologue from the play *Picnic*. Wore purple wrap dress. Very well prepared. Callback, and booked it!

All three auditions were for similar companies, and all were for musicals. I was well-prepared for each audition, performed similar packages at each audition, and received callbacks from each company; however, I only booked one job. Based on the patterns, I can see that the best package is *Starting Here, Starting Now* followed by *Picnic*, but only when I wear my purple wrap dress. Apparently, it is the most flattering. Now, I know which personally works best. Of course your audition will be more nuanced than the above example, and you may have to do a little more detective work, but the habits and patterns you begin to recognize will be invaluable in diagnosing your audition weaknesses and helping you put together a winning package.

Now, of course, there will be times when I do this exact combination and I still will not book the job. That is life, and that is auditioning, and that is when things *are* out of your control. But journaling is about doing what you can do to put yourself in the best possible light first and then letting go.

Charting your personal habits before the audition is also just as important. As I said before, an actor’s audition begins the night before with prep work (i.e. laying out clothes, double

checking directions to the audition, and getting a good night's sleep). Start recording these parts of your life, too, and you may realize it is not your material or your outfit choice that is keeping you from booking the job, but the fact that you can never find your keys in the morning and are, therefore, starting your whole day off wrong. Auditioning is a lifestyle, not just an appointment, so take note of everything and set yourself up to succeed.

Make a Plan

Now, that you have a few auditions under your belt, a sense of who you are, and what it takes to succeed as a professional actor, the time has come to make a plan. As head of "*You Incorporated*" you are in charge of product development, advertising and marketing, inventory, and you are your own receptionist. Better get organized! Going to auditions is not enough, you must now also manage yourself and your career. If you look at yourself like a small company, you will want to come up with a business plan. Most small business plans should contain the following:

The Mission Statement: Why do you want to be an actor? What kind of actor do you want to be?

Summary of Current Services: What do you offer? Where are you currently working?

Summary of Future Plans: What are your immediate goals? How do you plan to achieve them? What are your goals for the future?

Target Market: What types of acting work will you pursue? What types of theaters or production companies use what you have to offer? In the particular sectors you identify, what are the histories of this market? What are some recent works or trends in this type of theatre or film work?

Competitive Analysis: What unique gifts do you have to offer? How do your skill sets compare to others pursuing this type of market? Does your reputation and reliability compare?

Organization and Management: How will you organize yourself? This is a good time to set aside an area in your apartment designated just for working on the acting business. Designate an area where you have an office supplies, a calendar, and computer. Determine what time of the day you will conduct business. Set aside time each day to answer emails, update your website, and look for auditions.

Marketing Strategy: How will you reach potential theaters, agents, or casting directors? Your audition file (head-shots, resumes, audition journal, list of theaters, etc.) is your calling card. Start now to put together a professional looking, but honest folder, and commit to keeping it up to date. Begin a file or notebook containing contact information and leads. Follow up on these leads quickly and make a point of keeping these contacts active.

Service Line: What is it that you are offering? Be specific in describing your product. Defining yourself is valuable in determining the assets you will emphasize. What do you have to offer? For me, it is a quirky brunette who acts, sings, and dances well and also has a particular knack for performing and working with youth audiences.

Brand: It may seem funny to think of yourself as a brand, but branding can really help your career when you are young and trying to get your foot in the door. Repeating your name prominently in correspondence, your audition portfolio, your head shot, and all other connected documents is important. You are your own brand and repetition is the way for it to stick.

After you have designed a modified business plan start thinking about how you will use media in your career. With everyone online these days, media can be a great tool for you to

consider using when self-managing a career. For starters, think about your email account. I advise my students to get one email that includes your name and that you only use for your career. There are several advantages to doing this. For one, you will be able to keep everything organized. Two, you can avoid the eye rolls when someone sees theatregal2222 is your email. Three, you can avoid your school shutting down your email after you graduate and losing all of your contacts. Also, make sure your Facebook™ account reflects that you are a professional. Social media is becoming an easy way to contact people and a great way to network. Make sure your accounts reflect the image you want to project.

Lastly, YouTube™ accounts are also a consideration. Because of financial constraints, I have seen many theaters taking video and online submissions for their shows, especially if you have the recommendation of a previous actor or technician who worked with the company. Further, it might be smart to make several videos of songs, monologues, and scene work that you can submit in the event that you cannot make it to an audition. Though theatre is very rarely captured well on film, make your videos as professional looking as you can afford. Theaters do use them. However, if you are going to use this medium it is your responsibility to make sure you understand and abide by copyright laws.

You may be asking yourself the question, do I really need to make an entire business plan? I believe you do. When you are a young performer without representation or management you must wear several hats in order to survive in this business until you reach those milestones and can afford to pay for her help. A simple plan will allow you to look at your career objectively. You will have a realistic idea of the effort required to reach your goals, what your current strengths and weakness are, and how to implement a plan to be proactive about them.

Business professors would probably argue that every business needs one and that it is the road map by which you can create a career. When creating a business plan, do not be intimidated. In fact, it can be liberating as you find creative ways to pursue the career you want so badly. Also, you will find that by simply writing down your goals and how you plan to reach them, you will help to hold yourself accountable by referring back to them regularly.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, the right amount of practice and preparation can allow you to have the job that you want and will also take away the anxiety of auditioning. You are working to become a professional actor, someone who gets paid to act, and there is simply no excuse for not developing these essential skills. Seek out as many opportunities as you can to put this knowledge into practice. The more you get out there, and continue to practice a habit of courage, the better you will get at presenting a winning audition package. You *can* do this, do not give up. Take your career into your own hands and make the opportunities and experiences happen for yourself. Break a leg!

Books For Further Reading:

Cohen, Robert. *Acting Professionally: Raw Facts about Careers in Acting*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2004. Print.

Gerle, Andrew. *The Enraged Accompanist's Guide to the Perfect Audition*. Montclair, NJ: Applause Theatre & Cinema, 2011. Print.

Gillespie, Bonnie. *Self-management for Actors: Getting down to (show) Business*. Los Angeles, CA: Cricket Feet Pub., 2009. Print.

Markus, Tom. *An Actor Behaves: from Audition to Performance*. Hollywood, CA: Samuel French Trade, 1992. Print.

Merlin, Joanna. *Auditioning: an Actor-friendly Guide*. New York: Vintage, 2001. Print.

Russell, Paul. *Acting: Make It Your Business : Avoid Mistakes and Achieve Success as a Working Actor*. New York: Back Stage, 2008. Print.

Volz, Jim. *The Back Stage Guide to Working in Regional Theater: Jobs for Actors and Other Theater Professionals*. New York: Back Stage, 2007. Print.

Wilson, Jerry S., and Ira Blumenthal. *Managing Brand You: Seven Steps to Creating Your Most Successful Self*. New York: AMACOM/American Management Association, 2008. Print.

Appendix A: Songs and Monologues to Avoid

Overdone Musicals:

- *Kiss Me Kate*
- *Les Miserables*
- *Little Shop of Horrors*
- *My Fair Lady*
- *Phantom of the Opera*
- *Wicked*

Individual Songs:

- Astonishing, *Little Women*
- All That Jazz, *Chicago*
- Hold On, *The Secret Garden*
- Lost in the Wilderness, *Children of Eden*
- Much More, *The Fantasticks*
- Nothing, *A Chorus Line*
- Shy, *Once Upon A Mattress*
- Spark of Creation, *Children of Eden*
- Waiting for Life, *Once On This Island*
- Wheels Of A Dream, *Ragtime*
- Vanilla Ice Cream, *She Loves Me*
- You Can Always Count On Me, *City of Angels*

Overdone Plays:

- Most plays Christopher Durang (especially *Laughing Wild*) and anything by Neil Simon
- *A Girl's Guide to Chaos*
- *A, My Name Is Alice*
- *Boy's Life*
- *Doubt*
- *The Food Chain*
- *The Glass Menagerie*
- *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*
- *Six Degrees of Separation*
- *Spiked Heels*
- *Quilters*
- *Wit* Where to Find Auditions

Appendix B: Where To Find Auditions

Regional Combined Auditions

Baltimore Theatre Alliance

www.baltimoreperforms.org

Application Deadline: Until sold out.

Audition Date: End of May

Baltimore Theatre Alliance host an open area-wide auditions each year for the region's theater artists and organizations.

Florida Professional Theatres Association

<http://www.fpta.net>

Application Deadline: Beginning of May

Audition Date: End of May

Florida Professional Theatres Association has an annual audition for actors eighteen years and older who are available for professional work.

League of Washington DC Area Theatres

www.lowt.org/lowt.html

Audition Date: Middle of February

The League of Washington DC Area Theatres is an annual auditions for professional actors in the DC Area. Professional and semiprofessional theaters attend the auditions each year to find talent for their upcoming seasons.

Midwest Theatre Auditions

<http://www.webster.edu/depts/finearts/theatre>

Application Deadline: First week of December

Audition Date: Second week of February

The Midwest Theatre Auditions are for Equity and non-equity performers looking for paid positions in summer stock, outdoor dramas, Shakespeare festivals, year-round theatres, internships in the Midwest region. Although there are over 450 audition slots available, audition slots are limited and are assigned on a first come basis. All applicants do not get a slot, so apply ASAP!

New England Theatre Conference

<http://www.netconline.org>

Application Deadline: February 1.

Audition Date: Middle of March.

The New England Theatre Conference Auditions are open to non-equity performers and college students. Potential auditionees are prescreened in acting and/or musical talent. Both job-in and full-season openings are available in Equity and non-equity theaters, college-based theaters, repertory companies, Shakespeare festivals, Renaissance faires, outdoor dramas, children's theatre, diner theatre and intern and apprentice programs. Only highly experienced, well trained performers should apply for an audition slot.

Ohio Theatre Alliance Auditions

<http://www.ohiotheatrealliance.org>

Open to Equity and non-equity performers and students, 18 years or older. Performance contracts for summer, year-round, paying and nonpaying, graduate and training programs, internships, touring groups, children's theatre, outdoor drama, and summer stock.

National Outdoor Drama Auditions

Institute of Outdoor Drama

www.unc.edu/depts/outdoor/auditions

Application Deadline: Beginning of February

Audition Date: Mid March

The National Outdoor Drama Auditions are for actors eighteen or older who are available for summer work. Outdoor dramas are plays performed in scenic, large amphitheaters across the country. They tell the story of a dramatic historic event or represent the life of a historic person.. Performers with stunt, stage combat and horseback skills are especially sought after.

Southeastern Theatre Conference

<http://www.setc.org>

Application Deadline: Early Fall

Audition Date: First Week of March

The South Eastern Theatre Conference Auditions are for Equity and non-equity actors and dancers seeking professional, summer, full-time, paid positions with professional companies. To attain an audition slot as a college student you must attend a state screening audition.

StrawHat Auditions

<http://www.strawhat-auditions.com>

Application Deadline: Beginning of January

Audition Date: Mid-End of February

Registration Fee: \$43.00

StrawHat Auditions are open to Non-equity actors, eighteen or older, seeking work in professional theatre. Most auditions are for summer stock theaters although some regional theaters also attend and can offer year-round opportunities. Applicants are screened. This is a

very competitive. All accepted applicants have their picture and résumé published in the StrawHat National Resource Book which is distributed to all the attending theater. Applicants who are not selected or are unable to audition can also be included in this publication for a small fee.

Unified Professional Theatre Auditions (UPTA)

<http://www.upta.org>

Application Deadline: December

Audition Date: First week of February.

Registration Fee: \$37.50

The Unified Professional Theatre Auditions is for performers seeking paid year-round positions. In my opinion, this audition should not be missed. You may not audition at these as a college student until your senior year and with a signed application from the chair of your department. The only exception would be for students who are members of AEA or EMC, or have worked at an UPTA theatre or TCG Theatre. Even though the deadline is at the end of December, check in October when they post, because this audition is usually full within 2 days!

University/Resident Theatre Association (U/RTA)

Application Deadline: End of November.

Audition Date: First week of February (New York, second week of February (Chicago).

All acting applicants must attend a screening audition. These auditions are designed for college graduates who are seeking advanced study through Graduate school. Several hundred positions are offered annually primarily through acceptance in MFA graduate programs. Casting opportunities are also available in Shakespeare Festivals, resident theatre companies both on and off campus and various seasonal activities.

Area Theatres:

- Barter Theatre, VA
- Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre, VA
- Central Piedmont Summer Theatre, NC
- Charlotte Children's Theatre, NC
- Flat Rock Playhouse, NC
- Greenbrier Valley Theatre, WV
- Heritage Theatre Festival, VA
- Lees McRae Summer Theatre, NC
- Olney Theatre Center, MD
- National Players, MD
- Parkway Playhouse, NC
- Playmakers Repertory Theatre, NC
- Riverside Dinner Theatre, VA
- Roanoke Children's Theatre, VA
- Shenandoah Conservatory Summer Theatre, VA

- The Lost Colony, NC
- The Prizery, VA
- Virginia Stage Company, VA
- Wayside Theatre, VA
- West Virginia Public Theatre, WV
- Wohlfahrt Haus Dinner Theatre, VA

Web Sites with Audition Posts:

- www.backstage.com
- www.playbill.com
- RichmondVATheater.com

Casting Directors and Coaches To Study With:

- Dave Clemons, <http://www.clemmonsdewing.com>
 - Mr. Clemons is a kind casting director, who regularly gives workshops in musical theatre audition technique, and has cast over a 100 Broadway shows and national tours.
- Michael Lavine, <http://www.michaellavine.net/>
 - Mr. Lavine is a talented accompanist who is known for owning the largest private collection of musical theatre sheet music and is a great audition vocal coach.
- Richard Robichaux, <http://www.richardrobichaux.com>
 - Mr. Robichaux is a gifted audition coach and master teacher of the Meisner Technique. He regularly appears at the Southeastern Theatre Conference, so be sure to take one of his workshops.

Appendix C: Resume Example

Katie Preston

Cell Phone: 804. 556. 5788

k.preston@gkmail.com

www.kpreston.info

Vocal range: Soprano I/Mezzo (E3-D6)

Height: 5'5"

Weight: 145

Eye/Hair: Brown

Professional Theatre

Hairspray!

(dir: Stanely Brooks)

The Music Man

A Year With Frog and Toad

Romeo & Juliet

You Can't Take it With You

Penny

Marian

Ensemble

Juliet

Alice

Mountain Theatre, TN

Big Summer Theatre, GA

Big Summer Theatre, GA

The Downtown Players, VA

The Downtown Players, VA

Educational Theatre

Urinetown!

Cabaret

Company

The Heidi Chronicles

Little Sally

Helga

Amy

Denise

Clover College, VA

Clover College, VA

Clover College, VA

Clover College, VA

Training

BFA, Musical Theatre, Clover College

Acting: Katie Brown, Michael Waters.

Voice: Kathryn Fink (Classical), Jonathan Swartzki (Pop, Musical Theatre, Jazz).

Dance: Ballet, Tap, Jazz (7 years), Star Ballet Theatre.

Musical Theatre: Kate Legauz, Kat Wheeley, Jonathan Smith.

Stage Combat (Hand to Hand): Jon Smith, Tyler Bradley.

Acting For Film: Dave Simons Casting, LA Theatre Exchange Summer Intensive.

Special Skills

Juggles

British Dialect

Great with Kids

Fluent Spanish

Plays Guitar

Contortionist

Sight Read

Gymnastics

Character Voices

Appendix D: Essence Questionnaire

- 1) What color best represents my personality?
- 2) If I were a celebrity what celebrity would I be?
- 3) If I were a fictional character from literature who would I be?
- 4) If I were a drink what kind of drink would I be?
- 5) When you see me what kind of textile do I remind you of?
- 6) What month of the year makes you think of me?
- 7) What kind of weather is my personality?
- 8) If I were a holiday what holiday would I be?
- 9) If I were a car what kind of car would I be?
- 10) When you see me what song do you think of?
- 11) If I was an animal what kind of animal would I be? Domestic or Wild?
- 12) When you look at me what twentieth century decade to I most remind you of?

Appendix E: Audition Journal

Logistics

Company: (What company did you audition for?)

Show: (For what show?)

Date: (When was the audition, when was the callback?)

Time: (What time did it take place?)

Place: (What building? Was it at the theater? What was the room like?)

The Audition

Monologue: (Name, title of play, and author of piece performed)

Song: (Name, title of musical, composer and lyricist.)

Clothing Worn: (Describe outfit, jewelry, makeup, shoes, etc.)

Auditors Present: (Who watched your audition?)

People I Met: (Who did you meet there? Actors? Directors? Stagemanagers? Musical Directors?)

Feedback: (What if any notes, comments, praise did you receive? Did they ask you to do any adjustments?)

Step by Step look back: (Trace back your preparation, waiting to audition, the audition, and after the audition)

I feel: (How do you feel about today's audition? What can you work on next time?)

One Thing I Nailed: (Where did you shine today?)

Appendix F: Course Syllabus, Course Proposal, SETC Proposal

Spring 2011: THEA 491 Section 18

Audition Technique

Monday/Wednesday

Shafer Street Playhouse

Instructors:

Meghan K. Kelleher

Anna K. Kurtz

Office Hours by appointment

11:30 am - 12:50pm

Newdick Theatre

Course Objectives:

- ▶ to assist students in compiling and developing an audition “toolbox”
 - contrasting monologues
 - audition song
 - how to survive a basic dance call
 - presentation of self/audition persona
 - head-shot and resume
- ▶ to help students gain fundamental techniques for management of self and career so that they can take an active role in their professional careers
- ▶ to help students be confident in themselves and in their abilities as an actor and auditioner so that they can trust themselves, their impulses, and their material in audition situations
- ▶ to assist students in their assessment of personal career goals and their options to achieve those goals

Required Materials:

- ▶ Audition Journal: will be used by students to document each audition situation
 - should be a bound notebook of student's choosing

Policies and Regulations:

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for success in this course. Many activities and exercises of this course cannot not be made-up if missed. You are allowed 2 absences. Your final course grade drops a full letter for each day you miss after the allotted two. Excused absences will be negotiated with

the instructor on an individual basis. If you leave class early without being excused you will be counted absent.

Punctuality

Three tardies equals one absence. Tardies exceeding twenty (20) minutes will be considered absences, but students are encouraged to still attend class even if they will be late by more than 20 minutes in order to gain experience and to benefit from exercises.

There will be a sign-in sheet provided each day. If you arrive after 11:30 AM you will be counted late. It is your responsibility to sign in at the beginning of each class period. Also, we reserve the right to declare a “no lateness” policy should the need arise. This means that if the door to the class is shut and you are not inside by the time class begins, you are absent. No exceptions.

Professionalism

- Express yourself. Speak up. Ask Questions.
- Auditioning can produce a high stakes, high energy, and sensitive environment. We encourage you to make big choices and to push yourself and your acting outside the box. Any critiques expressed in class are for your benefit and development. There are no absolutes, no right and wrong and yet unlimited absolutes and unlimited rights and wrongs in the auditioning world. This is the time to put yourself out there and try new things; we hope to provide an atmosphere that encourages you to take risks.
- Respect others. Failure and emotional vulnerability are a great part of the audition process. It is therefore essential that we maintain the classroom as a “safe” space in which personal value judgements are laid aside. So, in class, please keep your evaluations, critiques, and comments positive and helpful.
- Should you compromise the safety of the space, we reserve the right to dismiss you from the class period resulting in an absence; prolonged disrespect and disruption will result from your dismissal from the class permanently. Disruptive behavior on the part of the student may result in the filing of formal charges under the University’s Rules and Procedures document.
- No eating in class. Only liquids in closed containers are allowed.
- Turn your cell phone off (not vibrate) before entering class. If your cell phone rings or vibrates, we reserve the right to ask you to leave at which time you will receive an absence for that day.
- All assignments are due at the start of the class period. Assignments turned in after class will be lowered one letter grade for each day it is late. Any assignment missed, unless discussed with instructor prior to assignment, will receive a zero.

Accompanist

It is the responsibility of each student to find an accompanist that can record their audition song music. Each student must provide a copy of the recorded accompaniment music to the instructors for in class use.

Dress Code

- Students must wear appropriate audition material as discussed in class for all audition days.
- Students must wear clothes in which they feel comfortable to work on all other days.
- Students must be prepared on dance days with appropriate dance attire and shoes.

Assignments (1000 total points)

Mock Auditions (450 points)

- Students will take part in 5 mock auditions including one final audition. Guest artists will assess these auditions. Their feedback will factor greatly into the final grades for each audition.
 - First Audition: 25 points
 - Midterm audition: 75 points
 - Mock audition 1: 100 points
 - Mock audition 2: 100 points
 - Final audition: 150 points

Head Shot and Resume (100 points- 25 each)

Your headshot and resume will be checked 4 times throughout the semester.

Presentation Days (150 points- 25 per presentation)

- Students will be graded on various presentation days such as: Monologue, Contrasting Monologue, Musical Audition Song, Dance Audition 1, Dance Audition 2, Shakespeare Monologue, Cold Readings

Participation (120 points)

- Since auditioning is a subjective process, the majority of your grade will be based on participation. Come prepared, come willing to work, and come eager to try new things.

Written Work

Audition Journal (180 points- 20 points each)

- The Audition Journal will be checked periodically throughout the course.
- There are 9 auditions to be included in the Audition Journal:
 - Students are required to document the 5 mock auditions and the VCU main stage auditions.
 - Students are also required to attend and document 3 other auditions throughout the semester. These auditions can be for S.A.L.T., can be in the greater Richmond area, or can be elsewhere.
 - Students may also document auditions beyond those required for this class.

Weekly Breakdown
(Subject to Change)

Day	What's Happening?	What's Due?
Week 1: Jan. 19	Introduction Strengths/Weaknesses	
Week 2: Jan. 24 Jan. 26	First Audition Discuss Audition The Slate	Head Shot and Resume 1
Week 3: Jan. 31 Feb. 2	Monologue 1 Work Monologue 1	Monologue 1 Choices
Week 4: Feb. 7 Feb. 9	Work Monologue 1 Present Monologue 1 Begin Dance Basics	
Week 5: Feb. 14 Feb. 16	Contrasting Monologue Work Contrasting	Contrasting Monologue Choices
Week 6: Feb. 21 Feb. 23	Work Contrasting Present Contrasting	
Week 7: Feb. 28 Mar. 2	Audition Song No Class: SETC	Audition Song Choices
Week 8: Mar. 7 Mar. 9	Midterm Audition Discuss Midterm Audition Dance Call	Head Shot and Resume 2
Week 9: Mar. 14/16	NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK	

Day	What's Happening?	What's Due?
Week 10: Mar. 21 Mar. 23	Work Audition Song Marking the Music Work Audition Song	Audition Songs Accompaniment Music
Week 11: Mar. 28 Mar. 30	Present Audition Song TBA	
Week 12: Apr. 4 Apr. 6	Cold Readings/Interviews Cold Readings/Interviews	
Week 13: Apr. 11 Apr. 13	TBA TBA	
Week 14: Apr. 18 Apr. 20	Mock Audition 1 Mock Audition 1	Head Shot and Resume 3
Week 15: Apr. 25 Apr. 27	Mock Audition 2 Mock Audition 2	
Week 16: May 2 May 4	Final Audition Final Audition part 2	Head Shot and Resume 4
Final	Discuss Final Audition Course Wrap Up	Audition Journal

Southeastern Theatre Conference Workshop Proposal

The Other You

Developing Your “Character“ for Audition Success

Submitted by Meghan Kelleher, Virginia Commonwealth University

Everyone has heard the advice, “if something besides acting can make you happy than do that instead, because this business is too hard.” As an audition coach, it is not my job to tell them they can’t, but rather to show them how they can succeed as actors.

Many great actors don’t work, and many mediocre actors do. Why? The perfect monologue and great song isn’t enough to get you hired. Hundreds of other actors can do that. You must set yourself apart!

When you audition you bring two characters into the audition: the character you play and the talented actor you present. Often casting directors decide whether or not they will hire someone in the critical moments an actor enters the room or steps on stage. Each second of an auditions counts. Success comes from developing the other you: that self-assured, gracious, excited, and perfectly prepared actor who auditions well. Auditioning is not a means to end, but rather a performance in and of itself.

My years as a working actor, coaching successful actors, and sitting behind the casting table (and refined through the hands-on teaching of Audition Technique) have lead me to the

conclusion that with proper instruction and insight, actors completing this course gain a significant edge.

This workshop is presented in a playful, fun approach using actual audition examples, developing entrances, introductions, and exits, and then critiquing to fine tune the specifics of each actors unique gifts while downplaying any weaknesses. We will explore techniques that create essential contrast and flexibility during their introduction and exit, and how to use it to their advantage. By mining the participants previous experiences and their unique assets, each comes away with a total audition package.

This workshop, while useful for anyone who auditions, is especially effective for the emerging artists auditioning at SETC and other large conferences and will provide practical tips and insight that will immediately enhance practical and essential audition skills.

Course Proposal- Fall 2010:

Audition Technique: Musicals, Monologues, and Management

Submitted by Meghan Kelleher and Anna K. Kurtz

Overview of course:

With this course students will begin their preparation to take control of their acting destiny. It is our hope the students will gain an understanding of auditioning as a necessary aspect of the professional world of theatre especially for those just starting out, those who have yet to establish a professional reputation, and those who have yet to obtain an agent. Before these two professional milestones occur it is up to the actors to manage and market themselves. There are many facets that contribute to this effort. Actors must set up audition appointments and manage their own schedules, their own time; they must network and get their name, preferably with a good reputation for pleasantness, diligence, and talent attached to it, circulating within the theatrical community; and they must effectively display their audition materials including personality, monologues, music, movement, head-shots, and resumes. Seriously auditioning as a means of gaining work and surviving in the professional world of theatre also includes diligence, perseverance, organization, and sufficient material; all of which are factors of this course. Furthermore, we want the students to be confident in the material they have prepared and in themselves so that they can successfully execute each audition no matter the circumstances and

no matter the requirements. We want them to begin the life long process of preparing themselves for anything.

Course Objectives:

- Develop an audition toolbox:
 - contrasting monologues
 - appropriate songs
 - skills for how to survive a basic dance call
 - presentation of self/audition persona
 - head-shot and resume
- Apply and adapt the audition toolbox to a variety of audition situations
- Understand auditioning as a significant aspect of ‘theatre as a career/business’
- Gain fundamental techniques for management of self and career in beginning professionals:
learn how to take an active role in auditioning and professional world

Course Structure:

The first 11 weeks of the course will be utilized in order to help the students develop their audition toolbox. Each week or cluster of weeks will focus on a different aspect: basic dance steps, contrasting monologues, classical monologues, appropriate 16 bar song choices, head shot, resume, and cold readings. Another important aspect of these weeks will be a focus on presentation of self and audition persona. An audition starts before an actor walks in the door; eyes of the company are everywhere meaning actors must always be on their best behavior. They must show themselves in the best light in every situation. Just because an actor does not get hired

does not mean the company was not impressed by the actor; through appropriate behavior and projection of talent the company may call the actor for another audition at a later date.

The last 4 weeks will be utilized in order for the students to apply their toolbox in various audition situations set up by the instructors of the course. By developing audition basics and materials with which to work, actors can adapt to any audition situation, of which they will meet many. Each time an actor walks in the door of an audition it is unknown what is on the other side: how many people are in the room, what size is the room, where should the actor stand, etc. Furthermore, what will occur on the other side: will they ask to see different materials, will they ask to hear a song, will they ask for a scene to be read, will they give direction? The course objectives will culminate in a major audition in SETC/UPTA/VTa style during finals week in which the students will audition with a monologue and song, take part in a dance call, and undergo callbacks/interviews. All of the audition situations will hopefully incorporate locations and theatre professionals outside VCU as well as inside VCU.

Course Content:

This course is designed for junior year students in preparation for their senior year when they will be auditioning with the goal of attaining professional theatre work. Since it is designed for juniors it is understood that the students partaking in this course have successfully completed their first two years in the performance degree at VCU; meaning that they have taken acting, voice, and movement classes, classes that have provided them with the tools necessary to prepare monologues and other material. This is not an acting class. Since students will be asked to find materials and prepare them; a significant component of this course will be for the students to work outside of class individually. It is our hope that the students will be able to work on

materials outside of class and then bring their discoveries and work to class in order to be coached.

One written requirement of the course will be for the students to keep an audition journal. Several months or even a year after auditioning an actor may get a call from a company asking the actor to come in for another audition. An actor most likely will not remember an audition from a year ago; therefore part of treating auditioning as a business is recording every audition the actor has been on; that way if the actor gets called at a later date the actor knows who that company is, for what the actor auditioned, and what the actor performed that so impressed them.

Final Thoughts:

We feel that we can each bring various connections, techniques, and experiences to this course in order to effectively prepare the students for the theatre profession. Together we hope to facilitate their transition into the working world of theatre by giving them the tools necessary to thrive within that setting. By the end of this course the junior students will hopefully feel prepared to jump into their senior years with the confidence and know-how to manage and market themselves by finding auditions and successfully executing those auditions.

Vita

Meghan K. Kelleher was born in Salem, VA on July 13, 1985 and is an American citizen. She graduated from Cave Spring High School in Roanoke, VA in 2003. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Preprofessional Musical Theatre from Emory & Henry College in 2007. During this time she attended the National Academy of Theatre in Sophia, Bulgaria, and worked for Mill Mountain Theatre, Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre, and Wohlfahrt Haus Dinner Theatre. She taught Audition Technique and Effective Speech at Virginia Commonwealth University. She has presented audition workshops in New York, Virginia, Tennessee, and most recently at the Southeastern Theatre Conference in Atlanta, GA. Directing credits include the VCU Players Tour of *Jack and the Wonder Beans* as well as *Unwrap Your Candy: Baby Talk* at the Shafer Street Playhouse, and *School House Rock, Live!*, *Aladdin*, *The Pied Piper*, *Jubilation*, *Sometimes In the Middle of the Night* at Roanoke Children's Theatre. Choreography and movement direction credits include *Apartment 3A* at the Shafer Street Playhouse, *Lucky Stiff*, *Picnic*, *Urinetown!*, and *Songs for a New World* at Emory & Henry College, and *Pocahontas* at Mill Mountain Theatre. She has performed as a resident actor at Merry Go Round Playhouse, Theatre IV, Prairie Fire Children's Theatre, and the Roanoke Children's Theatre. She is currently the Roanoke Children's Theatre's Summer Director of Education and Company Manager.